NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

LAND CLEARING

(Ac.)

CODE 460

DEFINITION

Removing trees, stumps, and other vegetation from wooded areas to achieve a conservation objective.

PURPOSE

Facilitate needed land use adjustments and improvements to an existing site in the interest of natural resource conservation.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to wooded areas for the removal of trees, stumps, brush, and other vegetation in order to implement a conservation objective.

CRITERIA

General. Clearing and disposal methods shall be in accordance with federal, state, and local laws. Methods must address the impacts to erosion control, air and water quality, and the safety of the public and property.

Limit disposal of cleared debris into standing or green timber. This will minimize the need for increased maintenance and reclearing while reducing fire hazards. Ensure that debris piles are at least 100 feet from adjacent woodland, buildings, or roads.

Disposal of cleared debris shall be in accordance with NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Woody Residue Treatment (Code 384); or if cleared debris disposed by burning, NRCS Conservation Practice Standard Prescribed Burning (Code 338).

Cleared area shall be left in a condition that facilitates the planned use and treatment of the land.

Water Quality. An area 50-foot wide will be left undisturbed between the area being cleared and all wetlands, water bodies and watercourses. Use NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (Code 391), Riparian Forest Buffers as a guide.

Soil Quality. Clearing shall be performed when the soil moisture content is such that soil structure damage or compaction is minimized.

Temporary cover will be established as necessary to control sheet, rill and wind erosion on the cleared area until the planned land use is in place.

CONSIDERATONS

General. When a salvage harvest is performed prior to land clearing, leaving taller stumps will facilitate final clearing and grubbing activities.

Land clearing should be conducted when disturbance to, and movement of, topsoil is minimized. Consideration should be given to land clearing during periods when the soil is frozen (in areas with minimal soil cover), during periods of dry summer conditions (in areas prone to water induced erosion), and during periods of low probability of high winds (in areas prone to wind-induced erosion).

Land clearing is generally more efficient for tree diameters less than 4 inches. For larger diameter trees, the root wad (or crown) should be removed during periods of low soil moisture. Moving debris during periods of high soil moisture can lead to deep rutting and burying of debris, complicating final cleanup.

Cultural Resources. Ground disturbing activities associated with this practice have the potential to affect cultural resources. Consideration should be given to using methods that minimize disturbance to the ground surface.

Fish and Wildlife Resources. Special attention should be given to maintaining habitat for fish and wildlife. Strip clearing, windrowing debris, and maintaining den and food trees can minimize impacts on wildlife.

Other Considerations. The orientation and layout of debris piles should be considered to promote proper curing of the debris and facilitate surface water drainage. Chained or pushed trees should be oriented so that they lay parallel to one another. Debris piles should follow ground contours and be high, narrow, compact and free of soil and snow. Debris piles, in general, should be between 15 to 25 feet wide, 10 to 15 feet high, and spaced 150 to 200 feet apart. At a minimum, debris piles should include an opening (within the debris pile) of approximately 30 feet at 200 foot intervals, and at other locations where routing of equipment, natural drainage, surface water runoff, and firebreaks may be needed.

Select appropriate equipment type, size, and capacity for land clearing tasks to facilitate the timely execution of the work in an economically feasible manner.

Activities which minimize the spread or introduction of weeds on a newly cleared site should be considered. Additionally, the disposal of vegetation by burying, composting, or mulching debris will facilitate decomposition and limit the release of carbon. Consider depth to bedrock if debris will be buried.

Consider removing non-vegetative debris present or as it surfaces during clearing.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for land clearing shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose.

At a minimum, plans and specifications shall include:

- A plan view or a description of the limits of land to be cleared
- The kinds of timber to be salvaged, lengths of logs, and location of stacking
- Disposal requirements for all materials not salvaged
- Orientation and layout of debris piles
- Requirements to control erosion, water pollution and air pollution
- Vegetative requirements
- Site specific specifications that describe the condition of the cleared area needed to facilitate the planned use and treatment of the land, including surface grading requirements if applicable.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

An Operation and Maintenance plan shall be prepared for use by the client. The plan shall include specific instructions to insure that this practice functions as intended throughout its expected life.

Minimum requirements to be addressed in the plan are:

- A maintenance program to maintain vegetative cover while controlling undesired and exotic vegetation
- Protection of watercourses and water quality after land clearing

- Avoid crossing cleared areas with heavy equipment when the ground is saturated
- Restrictions on the use of mechanical treatments, prescribed burning, pesticides and other chemicals that compromise the intended purpose.